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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 002297

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [KZ](#)
SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MINISTRY OF DEFENSE REQUESTS
ENHANCED HIGH-LEVEL TRAINING

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland: 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador called on Minister of Defense Akhmetov and, separately, Deputy Minister of Defense General Sembinov on November 19. The two meetings illustrate the generally sound U.S.-Kazakhstan military relationship, but they also illustrate Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy that balances its interests among the major powers. Although the Minister himself is said to be strongly pro-Russian, so far Deputy Minister Sembinov has often been able to go around him through influential contacts in the Presidential Administration (including the Security Council) and the Parliament. A masterful infighter like Sembinov is vital to Western interests. Our goal should be to meet fully our existing commitments and to continue to seek new openings. We should respond with enhanced budgets to the high-level military training that Minister Akhmetov says he seeks and that Deputy Minister Sembinov supports. END SUMMARY.

MINISTER OF DEFENSE DANIAL AKHMETOV

12. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by the Defense Attache, called on the sometimes elusive and allegedly pro-Russian Minister of Defense, Daniyal Akhmetov, on November 19. The Minister welcomed the Ambassador and accentuated our strategic partnership, especially in the military assistance that, since Kazakhstan's independence, has totaled about \$80 million in military equipment and training. He described the bilateral military relationship as positive and vowed it would continue to grow. The Ambassador thanked Akhmetov for his positive evaluation and predicted the bilateral relationship would indeed continue to grow in positive directions as we strengthen our strategic partnership. He thanked the Minister for Kazakhstan's five-year participation in Iraq and congratulated him for the positive Steppe Eagle NATO evaluation. He told the Minister that part of his role is to help Washington better understand Kazakhstan and, thus, would welcome hearing the Minister's priorities for enhancing the U.S.-Kazakhstan military-to-military relationship.

BILATERAL COOPERATION PRIORITIES

13. (C) Minister Akhmetov listed three priorities:

-- He said he seeks military education for higher-ranking officers, since Kazakhstan's new military doctrine requires a new type of officer with higher-level training, at least at the level of the U.S. National Defense University. He noted Kazakhstan is introducing a new C4I system (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence) but lacks trained personnel and would like to look to the United States for this training.

-- He requested continued assistance for Peace Support Operation capabilities, especially for a second KAZBRIG battalion within 1.5 years, rather than the five years it took for the first battalion.

-- He asked for higher-level training at the strategic, operational, and even tactical planning levels, especially for General Officers and other high-level MOD personnel, with a focus on best practices learned from the best armies in the world.

14. (C) The Ambassador praised Minister Akhmetov's priorities and suggested that training should also include Kazakhstan's participation in CHOD conferences and Kazakhstan hosting joint exercises, which, although the Ambassador did not dwell on the point, Kazakhstan this year had failed to accept. He said when militaries train together, their men and women become comrades-in-arms; politics falls by the wayside.

NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION NETWORK FOR AFGHANISTAN

15. (SBU) The Ambassador also briefly touched on the

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possibility of a greater role for Kazakhstan in Afghanistan, and previewed the November 21 visit by TRANSCOM CDR General Duncan McNabb, and the role Kazakhstan could play for stability in Afghanistan and the region by agreeing to the U.S. request to transit non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan through Kazakhstan's existing commercial structures. The Minister replied negotiations with NATO for this purpose are already well advanced, and he would foresee no problem for the United States to establish a northern distribution network through Kazakhstan.

16. (C) COMMENT: Though restrained, Minister Akhmetov was professional throughout this meeting with the Ambassador and, at times, almost cordial. His priorities for training would suggest the need for a significantly enhanced IMET budget. END COMMENT.

DEPUTY MINISTER BULAT SEMBINOV

17. (SBU) The Ambassador then met separately with the pro-Western Deputy Minister of Defense, General Bulat Sembinov, who was the most senior Kazakhstani official to have attended, with his wife, the Embassy's Marine Corps Ball on November 1. The Ambassador noted they had already met several times before but emphasized he wanted to show his respect with an initial formal meeting. He briefly reviewed his meeting with Minister Akhmetov, noted with satisfaction President-elect Barack Obama's telephone conversation with President Nursultan Nazarbayev (which Kazakhstan's mass media had widely and positively reported), and asked for General Sembinov's analysis of our military-to-military relationship.

18. (C) Relaxed and loquacious, General Sembinov praised joint U.S.-Kazakhstan work in threat reduction and counterterrorism. He judged Kazakhstan's experience in Iraq "had been an education, and we passed the exam. Our experience there will soon be needed in Afghanistan." Noting his longstanding progressive positions, he emphasized Kazakhstan's priorities are to continue cooperation with NATO (including the Individual Partnership Action Plan), with OSCE, and to fulfill Kazakhstan's new policy of "The Path to Europe."

¶9. (C) As priorities for the bilateral military relationship, he listed Peace Support Operations (as did Minister Akhmetov), development of Kazakhstan's military aviation capabilities, military education, development of an NCO Corps ("not an easy task," he admitted), and security in the Caspian region. General Sembinov urged further integration of our military-technical programs, with a focus on transitioning to high-quality new standards. As military-technical priorities, he listed Huey IIs, C-130s, and naval vessels for the Caspian.

¶10. (C) Deputy Minister General Sembinov noted Kazakhstan drafted its military doctrine with U.S. assistance, the only military doctrine in the Former Soviet Union that states explicitly transition to NATO standards and the possibility of participation in NATO operations. He stated firmly, "I am a firm believer in the axiom, 'if you say it, then you need to do it.' Open discussions make cooperation possible."

¶11. (C) The Ambassador thanked the Deputy Minister for his comments and added "if you say it, you will do it" is U.S. foreign policy. The United States might sometimes be frustratingly slow, but we are indeed a nation of our word. We are pragmatic and look for real solutions when we encounter problems. He said he understood Kazakhstan needed to move cautiously on a larger role in Afghanistan but emphasized that such cooperation would be historic and fully in line with Kazakhstan's international leadership in the political realm, as evidenced by its planned chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. He noted with approval Sembinov's mention of building Kazakhstan's air capabilities because the AFCENT Commander would like to visit Kazakhstan for consultations early in the new year.

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¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador quipped to General Sembinov that it looks as if we are going to keep the U.S. Embassy's Defense Attache busy in the coming years. General Sembinov commented he had been surprised to learn (from the Ambassador's extended interview in "Liter") that he had never served in the military. Sembinov mused, "You strike me as a former military officer."

¶13. (C) COMMENT: These two meetings illustrate the generally sound U.S.-Kazakhstan military relationship, but they also illustrate Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy that balances its interests among the major powers. Although the Minister himself is said to be strongly pro-Russian, so far Deputy Minister Sembinov has often been able to go around him through influential contacts in the Presidential Administration (including the Security Council) and the Parliament. A masterful infighter like Sembinov is vital to Western interests. Our goal should be to meet fully our existing commitments and to continue to seek new openings. We should respond with enhanced budgets to the high-level military training that Minister Akhmetov says he seeks. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND